

# Lynch's 'Wild At Heart' misses middle America

By JOHN RIGHTER

Samuel Goldwyn, the company distributing "Wild At Heart," is marketing this latest release of director David Lynch as a slightly twisted dramedy that middle America will be able to stomach, and even enjoy.

Get the --- out of here, Sam. "Wild At Heart" is a mediocre cult film, at best, and like all cult films, it will fly over the heads of Mainstream, U.S.A. Lynch, who directed the visually stunning and evocative "Blue Velvet" and "Elephant Man," leaves no punches unthrown in this demented dramedy that takes the comedic term "black" and darkens it a few pitches.

"Wild" is the story of Sailor (Nicolas Cage) and Lulu (Laura Dern), Southern, white-trash lovers on the run from Lulu's mother, Marietta (Diane Ladd in an awful performance), and her hired help. Sailor breaks parole from a sentence he received for bashing-in his would-be assassin's head at the film's beginning (it's funny--ha, ha), and then takes Lulu down the yellow brick road towards the black heart of America ("The Wizard of Oz" is actually a major tie-in with "Wild.")

On their trip from South Carolina to Louisiana and Texas, Sailor and Lulu run into a managerie of seedy, freakish characters, a predictable play of Lynch films. The worst of Lynch's bowel creations is the devilish grease-bag, Bobby Peru (Willem Dafoe), a skid row Clarke Gable who "pops" obese women in porno films. Peru is the final catastrophe for Sailor and Lulu, naive lovers who are doomed from the start. He sexually assaults Lulu, then sets-up sailor in a rigged heist. Fortunately, Lynch displays a sense of justice (Peru kind of loses his head in all the excitement).

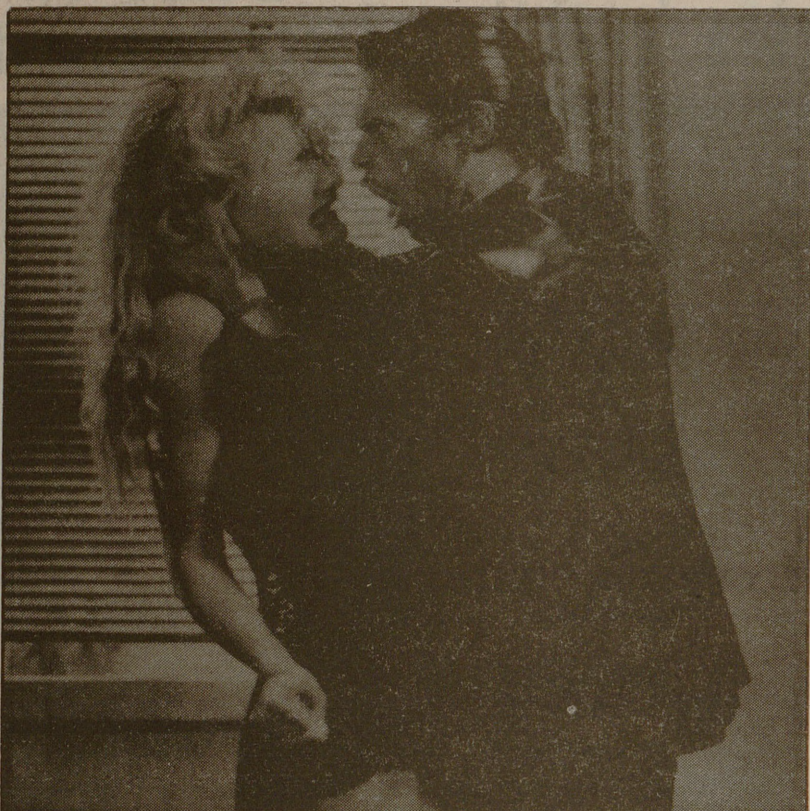
By film's end, there is a coming to terms for Sailor and Lulu, but what that exactly is we'll never know.

A great deal of controversy has surrounded "Wild At Heart." Lynch, co-creator and sometimes director of ABC's "Twin Peaks," is operating in a new ballpark now. The success of "Twin Peaks" has undoubtedly infringed upon Lynch's previously unchallenged creative license. Middle America is now a concern -- unlike before.

Personally, I wasn't shocked by "Wild At Heart," but then I've had "Eraserhead" and "Blue Velvet" as primers -- most of America has only experienced "Twin Peaks," the G-rated David Lynch.

Mystic love-death rituals, shot-off heads, kinky sex scenes and backwards-speaking bums are old tricks in Lynch's bag.

In fact, "Wild," for all its critical acclaim (which I don't understand), pales in comparison to the smoother, more enthralling "Twin Peaks."



Laura Dern and Willem Dafoe

Battalion File Photo

"Peaks" maintains some coherency and sanity; "Wild" is fragmented and lost in Lynch's idiosyncrasies and shock gimmicks.

Lynch has also lost any sense of subtlety with his symbolism and messages. The abstraction of "Eraserhead" is long gone, replaced by recurring images of striked matches, fire and unnormal "normal" people, symbolic passages thrown like a brick at the viewer.

A few scenes are successful by themselves.

The story of Lulu's cousin, Dale (Crispin Glover), a lunatic pathologically in love with Christmas and deathly afraid of black gloves, is hilarious, but awkwardly inserted and then forgotten.

Cage's Sailor is also funny (Cage is magnificent, as is Dafoe) and the only endearing creature of Lynch's skewed America. Sailor is the consummate American rebel-hero, a likeable freespirt who sounds and talks like Elvis Presley -- Mr. America, himself.

Sailor, unfortunately, cannot avoid trouble, but instead bravely embraces these predicaments as best as possible -- setting the stage for Lynch's most successful moments. From incident to incident, Sailor always maintains his cool image and Elvis-speak, the one trace of sanity in "Wild."

It's interesting that "Wild" was the big winner at the Cannes film festival last spring. The announcement of its award drew as many boos as cheers. I can empathize. At times, "Wild" is visually engrossing and shocking, but these visual screws come without the nuts and bolts of a good picture. "Wild" may be wierder than "Blue Velvet," but it doesn't come close to it as a complete piece of work.

Lynch appears more concerned with disturbing his viewers than entertaining them.

"Twin Peaks" fans be warned -- this is not ABC. The only thing "Wild" has in common with "Peaks" is Lynch's pessimistic view of America and the use of several "Peakers" in supporting roles (Sheryl Lee, Jack Nance, Sherilyn Fenn and David Patrick Kelly all make appearances.)

Cult-film junkies, though, pay homage. If you were scared by the acclaim Lynch received with "Peaks" -- well, he hasn't sold the farm. In fact, he tries too hard to make this a memorable, original film -- which for him it really isn't.

But, any film that can wrap such cynicism around "The Wizard of Oz" storyline, and can camp-up explicit violence and sex so well, will have an audience somewhere -- but, not in Mainstream, U.S.A. No way.

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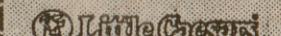
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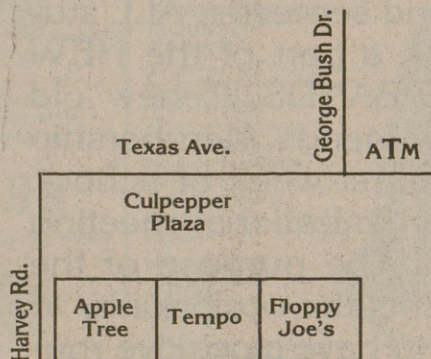
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